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ABSTRACT

This document contains findings of a survey that examined the opinions of Georgia citizens on their state's public education system. Data collection, based on The Harwood Group Policy Dialogues approach to public issues research, included: (1) discussions with four focus groups of approximately 12 participants each; (2) a statewide telephone survey of 500 Georgians; and (3) a full-day discussion session with 2 panels of 16 citizens. Findings indicate that improving public education is a top priority for most Georgians. Section 1 presents seven key principles for building sustainable change: (1) acknowledge citizen concerns; (2) build on the common ground that already exists; (3) set realistic expectations; (4) start small; (5) show progress; (6) find ways for everyone to act; and (7) engage people. The second section highlights people's baseline concerns about education--they want more accountability, safe and caring schools, better communications with schools, schools that emphasize learning, and a common-sense approach to improving schools. Section 3 describes participants' attitudes toward the following: order in the schools, parental and community involvement, teacher training, technology in the schools, and school administration. The appendix describes the research methodology and lists eight principles of conducting a successful policy dialogue. (LMI)

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# Conditions for Change

## Georgians Talk About How to Improve Public Schools and Education

## A Strategic Policy Paper

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Prepared for
The Georgia Partnership
for Excellence in Education
and
The Georgia Chamber
of Commerce

by
The Harwood Group
December 1994

This report was prepared by The Harwood Group:
John A. Creighton, Vice President
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## The Harwood Group
### A Public Issues Research and Innovations Company

The Harwood Group, a public issues research and innovations firm, works with public-sector organizations, coalitions, media, business, and foundations to define complex public issues, understand the attitudes and perspectives of individuals and groups affected by the issues, and develop strategies and programs that promote sustainable change. The firm provides a range of research and consulting services as well as education and training.

The Harwood Group has undertaken projects on various public issues, including education, youth, health care, economic development and change, environment, science and technology, the political process, civic life, and community development. Much of the firm's work centers on the process of social change and building social compacts.

The firm's recent education projects include two national studies on how the public views education reform and the role of public schools in American society; a study of how civic institutions form networks of support to contribute to public schools and education; and developing discussion tools for citizens and representatives of government agencies to build stronger working relationships to act on youth and education-related issues.

The Harwood Group's clients include: Georgia Health Decisions; CIVITAS/Center for Civic Education; the Pew Partnership for Civic Change; the Kettering Foundation; Knight-Ridder, Inc.; the U S WEST Foundation; *The Miami Herald*; *The Tallahassee Democrat*; National Commission for the Renewal of American Democracy (Project Democracy); Tennessee Valley Authority; and the Texas Chief Executives Roundtable.

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# Section I: Seizing the Opportunity

Today, Georgia has a genuine opportunity to improve its public schools and education.

This report, prepared by The Harwood Group for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, reveals that improving public education is a top priority for Georgians across the state.

What's more, Georgians strongly believe that every person in the state has a responsibility to contribute to efforts to improve their public schools.

This is the good news. But make no mistake, there are roadblocks on this road to change.

In The Harwood Group's travels across America, we hear people express time and again deep frustration about the conditions of their public schools; this research suggests that Georgians are frustrated too.

Georgians say that their schools are plagued by disorder and that their school system is largely devoid of accountability. They believe that far too often school environments are not hospitable to learning.

Georgians also are frustrated because they see clear courses of action to address their concerns, yet see little movement in these areas. Instead, they report hearing about *school reform* efforts that bear little connection to their deeper concerns.

The result: the depth of people's frustration is evident in their assertion that they are unwilling to pay higher taxes to support public schools *until* they see action to address their core concerns. Moreover, they express a willingness to remove their children from public schools and send them to private or "business" run schools — if they could afford to do so.

While it would be easy to focus solely on people's frustrations, we believe that would miss this report's bottom-line message: Georgians genuinely want to confront the problems facing their public schools and education.

## A New Compact

When you read this report, you can almost hear the voices of Georgians calling out for people in the state to find new ways to work together to improve public education.

Georgians are looking to strike a new social compact: for instance, they want parents and communities to take greater responsibility for Georgia's youth, while at the same time to hold students, parents, and educators more accountable for their actions. What's more, they want two-way, ongoing communication between public schools and the larger community to make sure this compact stays on track.

Georgians believe that they *must* work together in order to create opportunities to prepare the next generation for the future.

The people we engaged in this research believe that such change is possible *only if* everyone works together; no single group — whether it is teachers, parents, administrators, social workers, or anyone else — can effectively educate children on their own.

The notion that everyone in the community must play a larger role in the education of Georgia's children emerged in every stage of our research

# Education Is a Top Concern Among Georgians

Choosing from a range of challenges facing Georgia, statewide survey participants most often say that drugs, crime and violence, and education are the highest priorities for immediate action.

| Issue | High Priority for Immediate Action |
|---|---|
| Fighting drugs | 87% |
| Reducing crime and violence | 87% |
| **Improving the quality of public schools/education** | **85%** |

A gap divides those issues that Georgians rank next as high priorities for immediate action:

| Issue | High Priority for Immediate Action |
|---|---|
| Strengthening morality/ethics/values | 71% |
| Reducing poverty | 63% |
| Strengthening the state economy/ creating jobs | 62% |
| Addressing racial tension | 56% |
| Improving the environment | 52% |
| Reducing taxes | 50% |

What's more, an overwhelming 76% say that fundamental or major changes in public education are necessary, while less than 2% say that no changes at all are needed.

— from how people defined the challenges Georgia must confront, to the solutions they seek for improving their schools and education.

But building a new social compact around education will not happen overnight. It will take time and hard work; Georgians *expect* the process of change to be long and tough. As many Georgians said in the initial focus group conversations: "We didn't get where we are overnight, and we won't turn things around overnight."

## A Different Conversation

Moving ahead effectively also will require a different kind of conversation from the one people normally hear when it comes to education, one that is based on a different set of questions.

Too often, discussions about public schools and education focus on such questions as: "What will it take for *schools* to do their job better?" But this question downplays, for example, the responsibilities that parents and community members believe they must assume in order to help improve education throughout the state; it can serve to relegate people to activities like school bake sales and fund raisers, making them mere bystanders in the real work of an improvement process.

School reform debates also tend to become mired in questions centered on which "technical solution" will work best — such as *exactly* how many children should be in a third grade classroom or the detailed nuances of a new school financing scheme; these discussions can become dominated by "insiders talk," causing people's eyes literally to glaze over and effectively shutting people out of the conversation. Meanwhile people's fundamental concerns — such as the need to restore order in schools — go unheeded.

Indeed, in many reform discussions the public's concerns get pushed aside and a deep disconnection between reformers and the public can grow; people then become frustrated and disengage from the public debate; their sense of possibility and desire to get involved is left untapped; there is a failure to forge the new social compacts that people seek. In the end, it is difficult to create effective and sustainable change.

## Building Sustainable Change

The Harwood Group's experience suggests that in order to move ahead effectively — to tap the desire among Georgians to improve their public schools and education — it will not be enough merely to announce and pursue a new set of actions. Rather, those people who seek to be catalysts for public education improvements must engage people in a change process.

This research, along with other Harwood Group projects on education and public life, suggest seven key principles for building sustainable change on education in Georgia.

### #1 Acknowledge Citizen Concerns.

Georgians need to know that their concerns are understood and that those concerns will help to form the overall context in which efforts are made to improve schools and education.

If Georgians sense that public leaders and educators do not understand their core concerns — or that these concerns are brushed aside or acknowledged only in passing — they may resist efforts to improve public education. (The next section of this report outlines Georgians' overarching concerns for public schools and education.)

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### #2 Build on the Common Ground that Already Exists.

It would be possible to begin the process of change by seeking to act on those issues on which people sharply disagree, or that simply are the most contentious. But that course of action will lead only to division, gridlock and ultimately inaction. Georgians want to see improvements in their schools and education.

This report suggests that Georgians do share common ground in how they define a number of key concerns about public schools and education and what they believe needs to be done in response to those concerns. This common ground serves as a foundation on which to create sustainable change in the state; that is where action should begin.

### #3 Set Realistic Expectations.

Georgians have become wary of grand pronouncements of "reform initiatives" and promises for change. They believe that improving schools and education in Georgia will not be easy, nor something that can be done through a single piece of legislation. People's sense of frustration and cynicism will only grow if leaders unveil new efforts to improve schools that people perceive as empty rhetoric and the latest fad.

People want plain talk and realistic expectations to be set about change. Public leaders must be up-front about how fast — or slow — change will come; discuss who is responsible for acting; and admit failure when it occurs. If people believe they are being squared with, they are more likely to be patient, to tolerate efforts that do not always meet with absolute success, and to stick with a change process that takes time.

### #4 Start Small.

Conventional wisdom suggests that people want problems solved immediately and in one simple step. Indeed, public leaders often think that they must make sweeping change, or none at all. But on many issues citizens want a response that is more like a series of steps so that they can see change unfold. Education is one of those issues.

If change is thrust upon people too quickly, the change process is likely to break down — people will not be willing to support it. Fear of changes will set in; mistrust in the system's capability to deliver will cause people to question a plan of action. In this time of cynicism and mistrust, it is important to take small steps to gain the public's support.

### #5 Show Progress.

Citizens across Georgia — like many citizens across America — have lost faith in public institutions' ability to follow through on what they promise; they often believe that public institutions are rife with waste and misplaced priorities; that they are part of the problem, not the solution. Georgians hold such views about their public schools.

If Georgians are to invest their hard-earned dollars and scarce time in efforts to improve schools and education, then they want to see evidence of progress along the way. Rhetoric will not do; there must be an explicit effort to demonstrate progress along the way — that will do more for building public trust and creating the possibility for further action than anything else.

### #6 Find Ways For Everyone to Act.

This research, along with other Harwood Group projects on education and public life, reveals that people want to play a role in bringing about change. Indeed, Georgians believe strongly that parents and the larger community must be actively involved if efforts to improve public schools and education are to succeed. But often times people do not know how they can act.

Thus it will be necessary to help Georgians — parents, citizens, businesses, and others — to define what they can do and how they can work with others to improve public schools and education. There is a strong desire among Georgians to participate; that desire is waiting to be tapped.

### #7 Engage People.

Often times, public support for change on a major public issue is sought by "selling" people on a pre-set plan, or on the need to pay higher taxes, or on the hopes that they will "get involved." These efforts typically are driven by public relations campaigns — much like selling soap or detergent. The goal is to get people to lend their passive support.

But on this issue it is clear that people must go beyond being passive consumers — Georgians say that they must take ownership of their public schools and of other community efforts to educate children in the state: that people need to be involved in setting priorities for their schools and in working through some of the tough issues (like how to restructure school calendars and the potential effects on family life); that each community must marshall its resources to bring about change; that people's desire to participate must be tapped.

To mobilize a state, people must be *engaged* in the change process — there must be places for people to talk about the need to improve public education and to set priorities for change; to discover how they themselves can contribute; and to find ways for everyone to work together. The engagement of Georgians must be a key facet of any change process on education.

Today, Georgia has a genuine opportunity to improve public schools and education. We believe that these seven principles are among the keystones to building effective and sustainable change.

# Section II: Conditions for Change

Seizing the opportunity to improve public schools and education in Georgia requires that public leaders and educators understand the meaning and depth of people's core concerns. The failure to adequately address these concerns may produce strong public resistance to efforts to improve schools and education.

There are five key points that emerge from this research in terms of how the public views education in Georgia and what people believe needs to be done to improve it. These points can be considered *conditions for change* — the framework within which the public wants action. These are people's baseline concerns; they permeated virtually every conversation we held with Georgians on education.

As is noted in subsequent sections of this report, Georgians believe that action is clearly needed in areas beyond these five conditions — for instance, to make greater and more effective use of technology in classrooms. What's more, Georgians assert that school professionals may see challenges that they do not; people do not consider themselves professional educators, nor do they seek to replace them.

At issue is whether the public's most fundamental concerns are heeded and made a central part of the larger context of seeking change. This is not to say that people want their leaders to stick up their thumbs and test the winds of public opinion; instead, they want leaders to understand their deepest, informed concerns and to factor them into the decision-making process. But too often, Georgians feel that their concerns are brushed aside as if they are wholly ignorant about schools and what it will take to improve them.

If Georgians' concerns are not taken seriously, then creating sustainable change will be difficult; people will be less likely to pay attention to discussions to improve education and they will be more likely to resist efforts that call for them to make any kind of sacrifice, including giving more of their hard-earned money or time to public schools and the education of Georgia's youth.

When it comes to engaging the public to improve schools and education, this Harwood Group research suggests these five conditions:

### #1 Georgians Want More Accountability.

Until Georgians see progress in this area, it seems highly unlikely that they will support proposals that require them to make additional sacrifices, such as paying higher taxes. Equally important, they will continue to question the effectiveness of public schools and their ability to educate children. Georgians' desire for greater accountability cannot be overemphasized.

### #2 Georgians Want Safe and Caring Schools.

Georgians want public schools to regain control of their classrooms, hallways, and grounds. They want schools to be safe places for their children to learn, and they want teachers and administrators to care deeply about the welfare of their children.

Today, Georgians say many schools are neither safe nor caring. Most Georgians believe that effective action must be taken to reclaim the schools from turmoil and neglect *and* that

## Georgians Believe Problems Affecting Public Schools Reach Beyond the "Schoolhouse"

Georgians are most concerned about issues that at least begin outside the "schoolhouse" — with the exception of teacher/student ratios.

| Top Concerns | Percent Who Say Problem Is Critical[1] |
|---|---|
| Drugs in schools | 74 |
| Violence in schools | 74 |
| Lack of parental involvement | 72 |
| Lack of discipline in schools | 65 |
| Problems in students' home or personal lives | 62 |
| Too many students per teacher | 61 |

Georgians show the least concern about "schoolhouse" problems.[2]

| Problems of Least Concern | Percent Who Say Problem Is Critical |
|---|---|
| Inadequate financial support for schools | 42 |
| Too little attention for those who want to pursue vocational/technical education | 42 |
| Teachers don't effectively teach or motivate students | 41 |
| Outdated ways of teaching | 37 |
| Lack or technology such as computers in the classroom | 32 |
| Not enough time in the school year | 28 |

1 Seven to ten on a ten point scale where 0 means not a problem at all and 10 means a major problem.

2 There are five other concerns that lie between the twelve listed above — overcrowded schools; low expectations for students; lack of leadership; mismanagment of schools; and lack of community support. Approximately 51% to 55% of those surveyed rate these as critical.

teachers must reinvigorate their sense of caring for students. In the minds of Georgians, action in this area is a prerequisite to improving public schools and education.

### #3 Georgians Want Better Communications with Schools.

Georgians express deep concern about the quality of communications between schools *and* parents and the larger community. They suggest that this problem keeps parents from becoming fully engaged in their children's education, and keeps community members isolated from efforts to improve public schools.

People do not blindly "blame" the schools or teachers for this problem. They believe educators face tough challenges; they suggest that teachers and schools need far greater support from parents and the community in order to do their jobs well. But Georgians stress that better school-community communications is at the core of building this stronger relationship.

### #4 Georgians Want Schools to Emphasize Learning.

Georgians make it clear that they want schools to stay focused on a clear, fundamental mission: to prepare students for the future by providing opportunities for them to learn the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed.

Georgians do not want schools to become the dumping ground for a host of youth services — from recreation programs, to counseling, to conflict resolution programs. Instead, when such services are required, people argue that schools should work with existing networks of organizations within youth services so that children get all the support they need.

### #5 Georgians Want a Common-Sense Approach to Improving Schools.

Georgians do not want major programs to *reform* education. They are tired of grand schemes that begin with much fanfare, promise short-term results, and then seem to disappear. They are deeply cynical about such pronouncements.

This brief report suggests that Georgians want fundamental and straightforward kinds of action — nothing fancy; nothing that equates how much money is spent on education with the level of Georgians' commitment or the potential for success; nothing that suggests that a single silver bullet can be the answer. Georgians believe that improving schools and education will be a long-term process that must adhere to principles of common sense and enduring commitment.

## A Word of Caution

It is important to understand that these conditions for change are not the extent of action that Georgians believe is needed to improve schools and education; as noted earlier, Georgians believe that other changes are needed too. These changes are detailed on the pages that follow.

But, these conditions for change do represent the framework within which people seek to improve their schools and education. These are the public's baseline concerns.

***Proposals that ignore these conditions may encounter stiff opposition and cynicism.***

# Section III:
# Ideas for Improving Education

The Harwood Group research focused on six ideas for improving public schools and education. These ideas emerged from Georgians' key concerns identified in the initial focus groups *and* from the research and experience of GPEE and the Georgia Chamber.

In this section we outline what Georgians say about these six ideas:

- restoring order in schools;
- parental and community involvement;
- teacher training;
- technology in schools;
- restructuring how schools do business;
- financing schools.

Beyond the initial set of focus groups, each of these ideas was explored in a random sample, statewide survey and two Citizen Panels™ (see page 35 for methodology). In The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™, we engaged participants in working through a series of choices and trade-offs for action and finding areas of common ground for moving ahead.

# A. Restoring Order in Schools

Georgians want schools to restore order in their classrooms, hallways, and grounds so that children can have the opportunity to learn. When it comes to improving public schools, people say this is one of the most — if not *the* most — important area for action.

Georgians are not suggesting that their schools should be austere or puritanical when it comes to restoring order. Rather they want schools to act as any responsible parent might with their own child — to be nurturing and supportive, clear in the rules, and firm in enforcing the rules. Thus, to restore order, Georgians say that schools should:

- Set clear rules of conduct and explicitly articulate these rules to students;
- Enforce the rules in fair and consistent ways;
- Communicate with parents so that they understand the rules and how the rules are enforced *and* so that they can work more closely with the school to intervene before their child becomes disruptive;
- Make sure that students have access to counseling and other appropriate support they may need; and
- Deal with egregious offenders of the rules in clear and decisive ways by separating them from other students (there is some disagreement among Georgians on how to do this — see page 16).

Georgians say that various ideas often mentioned to restore order in schools — such as providing more students with more counseling programs and offering conflict resolution programs — are potentially important. But they are quick to point out that these methods should be used to supplement the setting and enforcement of rules; they should not be the primary focus of efforts to restore order. Georgians say that these kinds of approaches will be less necessary if rules are enforced in clear and consistent ways.

Georgians also assert that setting clear rules, in fair and consistent ways, is the *best* approach to teach values — which is often put forth today as a prime approach to restore order in schools. Georgians do not believe that separate or special programs should be created to teach values and morals. The most effective way to instill values in Georgia's youth, they argue, is to embody them in how the school is run and how children learn in the classroom.

Finally, Georgians flatly oppose such ideas as installing metal detectors in schools — at that point, they say, things will have gone too far. People respond to such ideas by saying that they do not want their children's schools to have the feel of prisons.

The statewide survey illustrates Georgians' desire for a "rules first, other approaches second" method to restoring order in schools. For instance:

- 75% said adopt stronger disciplinary measures so that students understand there are consequences if they misbehave.

They offered less, yet substantial, support for student counseling, conflict resolution programs, and separating disruptive students from others:

## Georgians Agree on Values to Teach in Schools

Almost all Georgians surveyed believe the following values should be taught in schools.

| Value | Say Should Be Taught in Schools |
|---|---|
| Respect for adults | 96% |
| Respect for people with whom you disagree | 95% |
| Respect for people of different races and ethnic backgrounds | 95% |
| Respect for people who hold different religious beliefs | 94% |
| Honesty | 94% |
| What it means to be a good citizen | 94% |
| Respect for people who hold different political or social views | 93% |
| The golden rule — do unto others as you would have them do unto you | 91% |
| Right from wrong | 91% |
| Patriotism, love of country | 90% |

A smaller majority believes that schools should teach sexual abstinence outside marriage (69%) and respect for people with different sexual orientations (60%).

- 63% said provide students with more counseling to help them work out problems that may cause misbehavior.

- 58% said send students who are continually disruptive to alternative classrooms or schools.

- 54% said invest in programs that train students to resolve conflicts among themselves to prevent the growth of school violence.

They showed relatively little support for ideas such as hiring security guards for schools:

- Only 36% said it would help a great deal to hire security guards to patrol hallways.

One last point: Georgians say that to restore order in schools it is essential for teachers and administrators to care deeply for the welfare of students *and* to pursue their *daily* work in ways that reinforce basic values such as honesty and respect for others. They feel that those elements are missing today.

Yet as mentioned earlier, Georgians do not blindly "blame" teachers who are not pursuing their work in these ways. They believe that teachers face many challenges and need far greater support to do their jobs well. In the statewide survey, for instance, 71% of Georgians said it would help a great deal to train teachers in how to deal with disruptive children so that they can better manage their classrooms.

## Thinking About Moving Ahead

This research indicates that Georgians do not want a "programmatic" response to restoring order in schools — they do not want special programs developed to teach conflict resolution, for instance, or even to teach values. Rather, they say efforts in these areas should be reflected in everything the school does — how teachers conduct their classes, how administrators deal with disruptive children, how schools communicate with parents.

One reason why this is such an important point to make is that some of the research findings in this report — if taken in isolation — might lead one to conclude that Georgians *do* want major initiatives when it comes, for instance, to teaching values in schools. In the statewide survey 60% of Georgians said schools should actively teach morals; yet, as noted, when people were asked to make choices and to find common ground for action, it becomes clear that Georgians do not want special classes to teach values, rather they want schools to be governed by a clear and consistent set of rules.

To Georgians, this is a "common sense" approach acting on the challenges facing public schools and education.

# Georgians Respond to Specific Proposals

In The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™, Georgians were asked to respond to several specific proposals for restoring order in schools. Here are a few points of note for each idea.

***On "getting tough" with students...***

- ☑ Georgians say enforcing clear rules is the best way to "get tough."
- ☑ There is some disagreement on the best way to deal with the most egregious offenders of school rules — some people favor keeping these students in school, perhaps in alternative classrooms; others seem to favor ideas such as special schools and "boot camps." *This area needs further investigation.*
- ☑ Most Georgians seem to view measures such as corporal punishment as appropriate only as a last resort — if ever at all.

***On investing in programs such as conflict resolution...***

- ☑ Georgians say that investing in special programs to teach conflict resolution is not a good way to spend scarce dollars. They do not want schools to adopt such special programs.
- ☑ People want children to learn to deal with conflict; but they suggest that such lessons should permeate how school rules are enforced, how children are taught to interact, and how classrooms are run.
- ☑ The only possible exception to this view relates to extremely disruptive students. Georgians say that special programs in conflict resolution may be appropriate for disruptive students who are placed in alternative classes or schools.

***On providing more students with counseling...***

- ☑ Georgians believe that it is important for students to receive the counseling they need, but they say that schools should play only a limited role in providing that counseling; they believe that current counseling services in schools are probably adequate for the purpose they serve (which people believe is for short-term intervention.)
- ☑ Georgians say that schools *should* actively seek to connect students with others in the community who do provide more extensive counseling services. They believe this is an important school-community partnership to pursue.

***On teaching students values...***

- ☑ Georgians believe that teaching values in schools is essential (see page 14), but they do not want special programs in this area.
- ☑ Georgians say the best way to teach values is to enforce rules in fair and consistent ways and for teachers to conduct themselves in ways that reinforce important values such as respect for others.

***On increasing school security...***

- ☑ Georgians adamantly oppose such ideas as installing metal detectors in schools and hiring security guards to patrol hallways.
- ☑ There is some disagreement over how far schools should go to enforce rules such as "no guns or drugs" — some seem to favor ideas such as conducting unannounced locker searches and drug tests; others oppose such ideas. *This area needs further investigation.*

# B. Parental and Community Involvement

## Parental Involvement

Georgians make it clear that they believe parental involvement is essential in order to improve public schools and education throughout the state.

In the initial focus groups, increasing parental involvement was among the top two priorities mentioned. In the statewide survey, 72% of Georgians said the lack of parental involvement in education is a critical problem — it was among people's top concerns; and 89% of all Georgians said that increasing parental support and involvement must be a key part of any effort to improve schools and education.

When asked to be specific about their views, Georgians said that parents should be involved with public schools and education at three levels. They also suggested that parents must take responsibility for finding the time for such involvement — even if only in small ways.

- **Parents must take care of business at home.**

  This is the most important role for parents according to Georgians. Parents must more actively keep up with their children's school work and activities *and* instill in their children the habits and values that enable them to learn.

- **Parents must work closely with teachers.**

  Parents should be in constant touch with teachers — and not just at parent-teacher conferences — to identify the child's strengths and weaknesses so that the student, parent, and teacher can work together. Georgians emphasize that working together requires two-way communication on the part of the parent and the teacher.

- **Parents must have opportunities to provide input on how public schools do business.**

  Georgians do not want parents to supplant the role of principals and teachers. Yet they do want a meaningful voice in how schools are run — beyond bake sales and fund raising. Their desire for input relates primarily to such areas as restoring order in schools and setting priorities for the *overall* mission of schools — what The Harwood Group would refer to as "public concerns" as opposed to "professional concerns," such as pedagogy and day-to-day management decisions, which people seem ready to leave to educators.

Georgians say that schools, businesses, and public leaders also must act in order for parents to become involved. Here are the types of actions people say these groups should take:

- **Schools must improve communications with parents.**

  This need applies to both teachers and administrators. Georgians say that personal communication is critical; they assert that the adoption of "new communication tools" by schools — such as voice mail and recorded messages — can cut off meaningful dialogue and make the institution feel faceless, cold, and distant. Schools must embrace a culture of openly and proactively communicating with parents.

- **Teachers must care enough to make the extra commitment to work with parents.**

  Georgians know they are asking a lot of teachers, but they say such expectations and commitment are part of the job.

- **Businesses must make it a priority for parents to be involved with education.**

  People want businesses to be more flexible in helping parents meet their obligations to their children — for instance, people say businesses should provide parents with time off from work to attend events such as parent-teacher conferences. Georgians assert that this would benefit students, schools and business by improving the quality of education in the state. (It is not clear how people think this issue should be handled in terms of paid versus unpaid time off.)

- **Public leaders — from the governor to the local principal — must emphasize the importance of parental involvement.**

  Georgians do not believe that the governor alone can do much to increase parental involvement; but people say he and other leaders can and should use their "bully pulpits" to bring attention to the issue and to *encourage* people to become more involved.

## Community Involvement

Georgians believe that every member of the community should make a contribution to educate children — *all* children. Indeed, Georgians say that paying taxes is not enough; they assert that people must give of their time too.

The need for the entire community to support education is a consistent message that emerges throughout this research. In the initial focus groups, participants in every group talked about the importance of connecting schools and the larger community.

In the statewide survey, a majority of Georgians said the lack of community support for children is a critical problem in public education; and 84% said civic groups, business, and others in the community must be actively involved in educating children if education is going to improve.

Georgians suggest three types of efforts to increase community involvement in public schools and education.

- **Community involvement in education must be embraced as a community value.**

  Georgians believe that everyone has something to offer when it comes to educating children and that people should make it a priority to find ways to contribute. They assert that community involvement must become an expectation within Georgia communities.

- **Schools and youth organizations — from Girl and Boy Scouts to soccer clubs — must actively seek to involve members of the community.**

  Georgians say that if people are just asked, they are more likely to become involved. The time to ask is now.

- **Communities and the state should consider providing incentives for people to get involved.**

  Georgians say that it is important to find ways to encourage people to become more involved with public schools and education. Some people raised the idea that tax credits, for instance, should be given to individuals who volunteer their time to work with public schools and to businesses that support public schools by giving donations, providing intern opportunities to students, and enabling employees to take time off to volunteer.

Finally, this Harwood Group research suggests that many Georgians are looking for leadership from business when it comes to increasing community involvement in public schools and education; people perceive the private sector as directly benefiting from quality schools and having the resources to help.

## Thinking About Moving Ahead

An important theme that emerges from this research, as well as from other Harwood Group research on education and public life, is that while people genuinely want to do more to help educate children, they don't know how. Thus, in the short term, many people may not act on their inclination to become more involved.

This suggests that it is essential to be constant in declaring the need for parental and community involvement; supportive in finding avenues for people to participate in meaningful ways; patient in people's response; and realistic in the time it will take to see noticeable changes in social attitudes, norms, and behaviors.

Finally, it is important that efforts to engage people in educating children come in the form of *encouragement*. "Telling" people that they must get more involved may put them on the defensive — and turn them away.

## Who Georgians Trust

When it comes to making education decisions, Georgians express the most confidence in local educators — they trust principals and teachers most, even more than parents.

| Group | Percent Who Are Very Confident Will Make Right Decisions |
|---|---|
| Local principals | 44 |
| Local teachers | 41 |
| Parents | 33 |
| Local school board | 27 |
| Local superintendent | 27 |
| People in the community | 25 |
| Governor of Georgia | 25 |
| State board of education | 19 |
| State department of education | 19 |
| Business leaders | 17 |
| State superintendent | 16 |
| State legislature | 14 |

## C. Teacher Training

Georgians believe strongly that quality teachers are one of the most essential ingredients to improve public schools and education throughout the state.

Georgians have faith in teachers — they trust teachers and principals more than any other group to make education decisions (see page 20). Indeed, people feel that teachers are shown too little respect and are underpaid; and they believe that teachers face many challenges in doing their jobs well.

These views lead Georgians to express strong support for better training and higher pay in order to attract and retain quality teachers. This was a recurring theme in the initial focus groups. And in the statewide survey, 65% of Georgians said it would help a great deal to provide teachers with ongoing opportunities to develop their professional skills; and 64% said it would help a great deal to raise teacher salaries.

Yet Georgians also believe that often times too little is expected of all teachers. In the initial focus groups Georgians said that teachers who are unable to meet higher standards must be let go; and in the statewide survey 63% of Georgians said it would help a great deal to require teachers to meet higher professional standards.

These views are not contradictory to Georgians. Rather people in the state seem to be seeking a new compact when it comes to teachers: they will support opportunities for professional development *and* higher pay for teachers *if* teachers seek to meet higher standards. What's more, Georgians seem to acknowledge that they hold teachers to exceedingly high expectations, yet feel that they must given the importance of the work that teachers do.

### Thinking About Moving Ahead

**The Harwood Group research suggests that Georgians want teacher training to focus on skills that will enable teachers to restore order in their classrooms *and* communicate in more effective ways with parents and community members. Moreover, Georgians believe that teachers should focus on helping students learn the skills and knowledge they need to succeed; they don't want teachers' time taken up with training in how to implement "new-fangled reform efforts."**

**Another point to keep in mind when moving ahead with teacher training initiatives is that Georgians do not want to spend more money on public schools. This means it may be necessary to go slow with proposals to invest in teacher training and to increase teacher pay. Recall, that while Georgians support these ideas, they also believe that there is ample money in school budgets to reorder priorities.**

## D. Technology in Schools

Georgians believe that schools should make technology a priority because it is so much a part of our world.

Yet Georgians do not believe that technology is the cure-all for education; rather they see it merely as a piece in the larger puzzle of efforts to improve and update schools.

These views were reflected in a statewide survey finding in which Georgians were split on whether it should be a school priority to provide students with more opportunities to use technology — 49% said that there are other priorities that must come first, while 46% said that such opportunities must be a top priority for education.

What is essential to understand is that Georgians want schools to be prudent in how they approach technology; indeed, this issue reflects Georgians' keen desire for a common sense approach to improving schools that is governed by taking small steps forward, holding schools accountable, and making sure the focus is on learning.

Here are key conditions that emerged from The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™ about implementing technology in Georgia schools.

- Georgians don't want technology to replace teachers; they believe that quality teachers are even more important when technology is in use.

- Georgians don't want schools to rush headlong into installing technology — they want schools to have clear plans for how it will be used so that money is not wasted.

- Georgians want schools to make sure that technicians are on hand who know how to operate and service the equipment so that it doesn't sit dormant.

- Georgians want schools to make sure that technology is used to promote student learning and not merely, for instance, to broadcast advertising or video games.

Georgians seem to like the idea that technology such as computers will enable students to learn at a pace that fits their individual skills. Yet, again, it is important to note that Georgians see this as a natural progression in improving education — *not* as a major reform initiative.

### Thinking About Moving Ahead

In moving ahead on technology, two possible barriers emerge from this Harwood Group research:

1. Many Georgians believe that the state lottery provides adequate funds for technology. They want a better understanding of how this money is being used before they are asked to spend more.

2. Georgians may react cynically if technology is "oversold" as a grand solution to improve schools. As noted in this section, they see technology as one piece of the puzzle.

# E. Restructuring How Schools Do Business

Georgians want schools to change how they do business so that schools can be more responsive to students' learning needs. They are reluctant, however, to *radically* restructure schools to meet this goal.

Indeed, the statewide survey findings might lead one to conclude that Georgians are flatly opposed to restructuring schools. In the survey, 73% of Georgians said it is a bad idea to increase the length of the school day; and 59% said it is a bad idea to increase the length of the school year.

Yet when Georgians have the opportunity to discuss the restructuring of schools and different aspects of it, it becomes clear that people do not reject these ideas outright, but rather that there are certain principles that drive Georgians' views on changing how schools do business.
The research reveals three key characteristics that Georgians believe should guide approaches to restructure schools: the focus should be on providing opportunities to learn; programs should be voluntary; and the changes should not require spending substantial amounts of new money. These views are consistent with the survey finding that 78% of Georgians support extra school days — on a voluntary basis — for those students who need more time in school.

Here are five observations that seem to serve as principles in how people think about restructuring schools; they emerged from conversations in The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™ about different options for changing how schools do business.

### #1 Georgians favor proposals that focus on learning opportunities for students.

Georgians respond favorably to ideas that would increase the learning programs offered by schools. For instance, they favor after-school programs ranging from homework support to vocational and business training. They see such efforts as being consistent with the mission of public schools.

### #2 Georgians say new programs should be *voluntary*.

Georgians do not think that new learning programs should be mandatory. They insist that students and parents should have the choice of whether or not to take advantage of opportunities offered by schools outside the traditional school day. They say that some people may decide to pursue other avenues for learning — or work.

### #3 Georgians want to see improvements in the existing school day before adding more days or changing how they are structured.

Georgians do not reject proposals for changing the school calendar outright, but they are not yet sold on the potential benefits. People say they want to see evidence that existing days are being effectively used before changing the school calendar — in particular before adding days to the calendar. In addition, Georgians hold many practical concerns about how changes to the school calendar might affect their day-to-day lives — such as coordinating day care if they have children on different schedules.

**#4 Georgians do not want schools to become social service agencies or "babysitting" services.**

Georgians do not want schools to bear inordinate responsibility for providing social services to children or to be a place that parents "dump" their children during non-school hours. They say that new programs adopted by schools should focus on learning opportunities for students — fitting within the educational mission of the schools.

**#5 Georgians do not want to spend a lot more money, if any, to change how schools do business.**

Geogians express some willingness to pay for additional learning programs, but they make it clear that before they are asked to pay more they want to see evidence that existing funds are being well-spent. As noted in the previous section, Georgians believe that ample money exists in school budgets to reorder priorities and improve schools.

## Thinking About Moving Ahead

The Harwood Group research on restructuring how schools do business suggests that schools need to work closely with parents and community members in order to move ahead in sustainable ways.

Indeed, Georgians are likely to reject ideas for restructuring schools unless they have meaningful opportunities to: (1) learn more about the benefits of changing how schools operate; (2) work through their practical concerns; and (3) consider alternative ways in which changes can be made.

# Georgians Respond to Specific Proposals

In The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™, Georgians were asked to respond to several specific proposals for restructuring how schools do business. Here are a few points of note for each idea.

***On increasing the number of days in the school year...***

- ☑ Most Georgians are not ready to add days to the school year — but they don't reject the idea outright, either. They want to see improvement in the existing days before adding more.
- ☑ Some people do see merit in this idea — they say that because children need to learn more today than in the past, they may need more time in school.
- ☑ Georgians do not respond to arguments about how much time children in other countries spend in school; they don't think comparing their children to children in other countries is relevant.
- ☑ Some Georgians express support for teachers working more days to do planning or participate in professional development programs, even if children don't go to school more days.

***On arranging the existing 180 days differently...***
(for instance, shorter summer vacations and longer breaks between terms)

- ☑ Georgians express many practical concerns when it comes to this idea: for instance, having family time for vacations; and children being able to pursue educational opportunities beyond schools, such as camps.
- ☑ Still, many Georgians are willing to think about arranging the existing school calendar differently as a way to make learning opportunities more effective.
- ☑ People do like the idea that children could spend less time reviewing old material and more time learning new material — it makes sense to people that if students have shorter summer breaks, they will be better able to retain information from the previous school year.

For these two ideas noted above, it is important to note that many of Georgians practical concerns — such as time for family vacations — seem to hinge on whether children will get enough of a break from school. Georgians want to make sure that children will have enough time just to be kids. In addition, people express concern about radically restructuring schools too quickly — and what it might means for family life, children's time in school, and the unknown consequences that might arise.

***On providing extra school days for those students who need them...***
(for instance, Saturday morning classes or classes between terms)

- ☑ Georgians think this idea makes a lot of sense.
- ☑ Many Georgians say that extra classes should be offered both to students who need to "catch-up" and to students who want to do work beyond the core curriculum.
- ☑ Georgians emphasize that extra class time should be mandatory *only* for those who have a lot of work to do to "catch-up."

## Georgians Respond to Specific Proposals (Continued)

***On providing additional services at schools after the traditional school day...***

☑ Georgians think it is a good idea to make use of schools after the traditional school day ends to provide additional services to children.

☑ But Georgians say that additional programs must emphasize "learning"; they respond favorably to programs ranging from homework support to vocational and business training. These efforts, they say, are consistent with the mission of schools.

***On voluntary pre-school...***

☑ Georgians support this idea. They see clear benefits from more children attending pre-school.

☑ Georgians also express willingness for traditional schools to provide these services.

For these last three ideas, it is important to note that people express a willingness to pay for these services with one clear caveat: they don't want to pay more in taxes. Georgians believe that existing funds should be reallocated to these programs and that parents should pay at least some fees for their children to take advantage of these additional opportunities — with the possible exception of pre-school.

## F. Financing Schools

The issue of school financing is a "hornet's nest." Georgians are deeply split and often defensive when discussing this issue.

Driving much of the emotion on this issue — as noted several times in this report — is a strong belief among Georgians that public schools have ample room in their budgets to cut waste, reorder priorities, and thus find additional resources they may need.

In The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™ there were five cross-currents simultaneously at work that made finding common ground on this issue difficult:

**#1** Wealthier Georgians resist school financing proposals that would require a significant redistribution of income from wealthier to poorer counties. They argue that they have made the personal sacrifices necessary to spend more on their own children's education, and that others in the state should make similar sacrifices if they deem education to be a priority.

**#2** Other Georgians — primarily those in our discussions who have lower incomes — believe that school financing *must* be based on a significant redistribution of income from wealthier to poorer counties. They argue that some school districts face stiff challenges to educating children — such as high poverty rates in the community, inadequate school facilities, and children with special learning needs — and that it is only by receiving *extra* money that students in these districts will have real opportunities to learn.

**#3** All Georgians agree that the way in which money is now spent on public schools is ineffective — in fact, they initially resist even talking about school financing issues because they first want to see waste and abuse cut out and a reordering of priorities.

### Thinking About Moving Ahead

Restructuring school financing is not a good place to begin conversations on ways to improve Georgia's public schools and education. This is a complicated and tough issue for people to discuss and it has the potential to bring out the worst in Georgians because of their strong sense of mistrust for how public institutions — including schools — are working. Emotions run so high on this issue that it is likely to overwhelm all other discussions on improving schools. Indeed, this issue is ripe for a demagogue to hi-jack the entire education discussion.

As noted at various points in this report, many Georgians believe that ample funds are now available in school budgets to improve schools. They say schools need to find places to reduce costs and reorder priorities. Thus there are pre-conditions to engaging citizens on school-finance issues: (1) show people how current funds are being used; (2) offer clear evidence that meaningful efforts are being made to reduce waste and abuse; and (3) provide opportunities to reorder priorities.

In addition, public debate on the financing of schools needs to be framed in such a way that all Georgians can understand the choices and trade-offs they face. If the state is to move ahead on this issue, people must have opportunities to work through these choices.

**#4** What's more, Georgians think that discussions on school financing will lead only to higher taxes; they strongly believe that there are some fundamental problems that need to be addressed before spending more money on schools.

**#5** School financing issues are so complex and confusing to people that they react largely based on emotion — mainly fear, mistrust, and suspicion of others' motivations. This issue tends to bring out the worst in people.

# Georgians Respond to Specific Proposals

In The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™, Georgians were asked to respond to different approaches for distributing funds to public schools and methods of taxation. Here are a few points of note for each.

***On ways to distribute funds...***

In conversations on how funds should be distributed to schools, only two points of common ground could be reached:

- ☑ Georgians agree that all schools should receive at least an equal, minimum payment for each student; and

- ☑ To meet this minimum payment, most Georgians seem willing to have *some* redistribution of funds from wealthier to poorer counties.

This point of common ground among Georgians is supported by the statewide survey too: 74% said that all public schools in the state should receive enough funding to meet students' basic needs, even if their own county would have to send money to a poorer county.

— BUT —

- ☑ There are some Georgians who strongly believe that *all* schools should receive and spend the *same* amount of money — that is, no school should be able to spend more just because it has more financial resources in its community. What's more, these same Georgians tend to believe that some schools should receive *extra* funding based on criteria such as poverty rates or students who have special needs.

- ☑ In response to proposals for "exactly the same" or "extra" funding, other Georgians challenge the underlying assumption that there is a direct connection between the amount of money spent on education and the quality of schools. What's more, they say, many schools would find a way to meet criteria for more funds even if they are undeserving.

- ☑ Finally, in what may be a contradiction of some of the points above, there seems to be a strong desire among *all* Georgians to keep financing issues local. People want to decide for themselves how much to spend on schools and the ways in which those funds should be spent.

***On methods of taxation...***

Time permitted in-depth discussion on methods of taxation in only one of the two Citizen Panels™. Here is what Georgians in this group said about property, income, and sales tax.

- ☑ Most seem eager to abandon the property tax. They say this tax places an unfair burden on a narrow group of people. Moreover, Georgians in this group suggest that this form of taxation is too complicated — assessment is arbitrary and people who know how to work the system are able to avoid paying their share.

- ☑ These Georgians seem split along economic lines when it comes to sales and income taxes. Wealthier participants seem to support sales tax because it would treat everyone the same. Lower income participants seem to support the income tax because people would pay based on their ability.

- ☑ Everyone agrees that the current income tax system is onerous and unfair. Again, Georgians say those who know how to work the system are able to avoid paying their fair share.

# Section IV: Issues to Explore Further

Emerging from this Harwood Group research are a handful of issues that may present obstacles to sustainable change. We believe that the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, and others who seek to improve public schools and education in the state should consider looking more closely at these issues.

Questions to explore further that emerge from this research include:

- **How should schools deal with the most egregious offenders of school rules?**

  Georgians believe strongly that the most disruptive students in schools are putting the education of all students at risk. They want schools to deal with these egregious offenders in clear and decisive ways by separating them from other students. Yet Georgians disagree on how to do this: some Georgians favor keeping these students in the school, perhaps in alternative classrooms; others lean toward ideas such as creating special schools and "boot camps."

- **How far should schools go to ensure that there are no guns or drugs in the schoolhouse?**

  Drugs and violence in schools are among Georgians chief concerns for public schools — in the statewide survey 74% said that these are critical problems; and in the initial focus groups and then in Citizen Panels,™ Georgians made it clear that they want guns and drugs out of their schools. Yet, at the same time, Georgians are adamant that they do not want schools to have the feel of prisons. They strongly oppose such ideas as installing metal detectors in schools and hiring security guards to patrol hallways — even to keep guns out of schools. Beyond these ideas, however, Georgians disagree on how schools should go about enforcing rules against guns and drugs — some favor ideas such as conducting unannounced locker searches and random drug tests; others strongly oppose such ideas.

- **How can communities create a community culture of parental and community involvement in education?**

  It is clear from this Harwood Group research that Georgians believe parental and community involvement are essential to improve public schools and education. Yet people are unsure of what they can do and how they can get involved; and many people, at least at first, may not act on their inclination to get more involved.

- **What are the best ways, if any, to begin restructuring the school calendar?**

  The practical concerns that Georgians express in response to proposals to restructure the school calendar are deeply-felt and genuine — it is not the case, as much conventional wisdom suggests, that people reject such changes out of hand. But Georgians are not yet

sold on the potential benefits of changing the school calendar *and* they are unsure of what such changes might mean for their day-to-day lives. The bottom-line is that Georgians are not likely to agree to significant changes in this area until they have the opportunity to better understand the potential benefits and to work through their practical concerns.

- **What are sustainable ways to finance public schools?**

  Questions around the financing of schools loom large over discussions to improve education. On this, more than any other issue, The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™ provoked deep-seated emotions and gave rise to divisiveness among participants. As noted throughout this report the sense of mistrust that Georgians feel toward public institutions, including public schools, is profound. They want to see evidence that public schools are making good use of money and resources; and they want to see schools make efforts to cut waste and abuse before Georgians are asked to make additional sacrifices. All of this has led to clear resistance among Georgians to even discuss issues of financing — people don't see their point of view fairly represented in the debate; they only hear calls for them to make more sacrifices.

# Appendix: About the Research

This research is based on The Harwood Group Policy Dialogues approach to public issues research. Policy Dialogues are a unique approach designed to dig beneath the surface and platitudes of what people think about an issue — to define clearly the key concerns and issues at hand; explore the choices and trade-offs involved with those issues; and identify key compacts that people want to strike when taking action.

This approach is an antidote to the "solution wars" we often see in public debate. Too often, leaders and interest groups create solutions in a vacuum, without considering the views of the public; then various factions fight among themselves, leading to an acrimonious and divisive debate.

The result is a lack of common ground for moving forward and little political will on which to base hard choices. The policy process stalls and the problem persists — or it is addressed with a Band-Aid® solution.

This Harwood Group Policy Dialogue, conducted for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, is intended as a foundation — a starting point — for moving ahead to improve public schools and education in Georgia.

Specifically, this research consisted of three components:

***Initial Focus Groups.*** Four focus groups were held with approximately 12 people each, representing a cross-section of Georgians according to age, gender, race, education, income, parents and non-parents. The purpose of the group discussions was to learn Georgians' starting points on public schools and education — their key concerns, perceptions, and values. These groups were held in the cities of Atlanta, Augusta, and Cordele, and Gwinnett County. Each discussion lasted three hours, was led by a trained moderator, and was audiotaped.

***Statewide Survey.*** A statewide, random-sample telephone survey of 500 Georgians was conducted to test hypotheses drawn from the focus groups and to probe more deeply into Georgians' views on education and how they weigh various choices, trade-offs, priorities, and values when it comes to public schools and education.

***The Harwood Group Citizen Panels™.*** Two highly-targeted, full day discussions were conducted with 16 people each, representing a cross-section of Georgians according to age, gender, race, education, income, parents and non-parents. The purpose of the panels was to engage people in making choices and finding common ground for moving ahead on key ideas for improving public schools and education. One discussion was held with Georgians in the city of Dublin and the other with participants from Dekalb and North Fulton Counties. Each disussion was led by a trained moderator, and was videotaped.

## Eight Principles for Success

A Policy Dialogue on education will look different from one on health care or the environment or welfare reform. Yet, through our work, we have identified at least eight principles that are critical to the success of any Policy Dialogue — on any issue and on the national, state, or local level.

**#1 Understand people's starting points.**

The dialogue must begin by exploring how various people initially approach the issue — listening for the particular concerns, experiences, and perspectives that shape their views.

**#2 Focus on values.**

Tensions and trade-offs between different values (such as fairness, responsibility, or opportunity) usually lie at the core of a difficult policy issue. Focusing the Policy Dialogue on values helps to clarify the issue and the fundamental choices involved.

**#3 Work through priorities and trade-offs.**

"Wish lists" aren't enough to produce change. Creating sustainable change requires that people set priorities and work through the tough trade-offs involved in the policy issue. As citizens set priorities and make trade-offs, they often shift away from being claimants to become problem-solvers.

**#4 Seek common ground.**

The emphasis of a Policy Dialogue, which brings together people from a wide range of perspectives and experiences, is to create common ground — helping people to uncover the values and goals they share and the choices and trade-offs they are willing to make.

**#5 Forge new compacts.**

At the heart of resolving tough choices and trade-offs often is a need to forge new compacts — what we are willing to do and under what conditions. Focusing on forging new compacts often helps to create new possibilities for change.

**#6 Account for the politics of change.**

It is often hard to create change on a complex and difficult issue, and efforts to bring about change sometimes focus only on one swift action. Yet, understanding the sequence and conditions under which change can occur is critical in trying to produce sustainable change.

**#7 Link citizens and decision-makers.**

A Policy Dialogue engages citizens and decision-makers in a dynamic, interactive process: citizen input is gathered throughout the process, and decision-makers have a direct hand both in framing issues and questions for discussion and in interpreting the results. Linking citizens and decision-makers makes the input more relevant and valuable.

**#8 Produce concrete results.**

A Policy Dialogue is not a "feel-good" exercise. By setting priorities, working through trade-offs, and forging new compacts, participants create a realistic agenda for change.